

4 JAN 1975

Approved For Release 2002/01/31 : CIA-RDP77M00144R000300100062-3

Cuba's Del: Surrogate for Russia's KGB

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One of the least known yet crucial obstacles to normalization of relations between Cuba and the United States is Fidel Castro's unabated support for violent subversive activities in this country and his all-out operations of Cuban intelligence as a surrogate for Russia's KGB.

Cuba's *Dirección General de Inteligencia* (DGI) is the largest and most modern and certainly most aggressive—national intelligence organization in the Western Hemisphere save for our own CIA.

While the DGI's *modus operandi*, targets and makeup have hitherto been little known save in highly classified intelligence circles, it is now emerging as a main focus and instrument of subversion, terrorism and espionage directly aimed at the U.S. government and American society.

Cuban funds as well as training in advanced terrorist techniques have in recent years supported a range of groups including Weathermen, SDS, Black Panthers, Puerto Rican revolutionaries, American Indian subversive movements, crypto-guerrilla Chicanos and the violent "FLQ" anti-American Quebec separatists in Canada.

Operating through so-called "Venceremos Brigades" of volunteer U.S. cane-cutters traveling to Cuba, Castro controls an extensive network of recruiters for Cuban subversion and intelligence activities.

Among widespread sea-based subversive and intelligence operations Castro still conducts throughout the hemisphere, Cuba maintains a flotilla of fishing boats in the Florida Straits and the approaches to Puerto Rico, to act as staging-points for infiltration and exfiltration of agents via small craft to and from U.S. territory.

The hub of Castro's American operations is the Cuban Mission to the United Nations, located behind a brownstone front at 6 East 67th Street, New York City, a few steps off Third Avenue.

This office, besides nominal diplomatic functions, serves as headquarters for the DGI. Approximately half the Cuban "diplomats" in this mission, including its chief, Ambassador Ricardo Alarón Quesada, are officials of the DGI and comprise its general staff for U.S. operations.

Since 1970, following victory in an internal power struggle lasting several years, the DGI has come under Kremlin control. Its director, Russian puppet José Mendes Cominches, is today wholly supervised by Gen. Viktor Semenov, chief KGB officer in Cuba.

During the past four years under intensive Russian tutelage, the DGI, now nearly 3,000 strong, has, in the words of one U.S. specialist, "markedly professionalized and widely internationalized its operations."

The DGI has two main functions in the United States. The first is that of any foreign intelligence agency: diplomatic, military, economic and technical espionage and counterespionage. The second, and in many ways more aggressive and sinister, is to discover and exploit unrest, disloyalty and social weakness throughout this country and where feasible inflame these into subversion, terrorism and violence.

One of the DGI's first major exercises in subversion was support of U.S. black militant organizations. Beginning in 1967, Cuba planted two DGI officers specializing in black movements in the New York U.N. mission. These two arranged entrance to Cuba for American black revolutionaries, for their training in certain of the over 100 Cuban guerrilla-schools and camps, and funded and advised them on return to this country.

In April 1969, unmasked by the FBI, the counselor and first secretary of the Cuban Mission hastily decamped from New York and were declared *persona non grata* for these activities.

Another U.N. Cuban in New York, third secretary Lázaro Espinosa Bonet, was also expelled in 1969 when he was discovered in an attempt to ferret out floor plans and security arrangements for President Nixon's Key Biscayne residence, as well as details of the President's Florida travel plans.

Close on the heels of their infiltration of the Black Panthers and other black groups, the Cubans established similar relationships with white terrorist-youth organizations, notably the SDS and Weathermen, representatives of whom have received training in Cuba.

Castro and his DGI enjoy the unique advantage—compared with the KGB—of romantic aura and allure for impressionable young people. Fidel and Che Guevara are still folk heroes. This

is one of the DGI's strongest assets in manipulating youth-dominated radical and terrorist groups.

Castro's pulling power with youth is illustrated in Cuba's exploitation of the Venceremos (Spanish for "We Will Conquer") Brigades, seven of which have been recruited in this country by Cuban agents since November 1969 with aggregate membership of about 2,000. According to intelligence sources, plans are well advanced to recruit an eighth Venceremos group to go illegally, like its predecessors, to Cuba next March.

These brigades—actually more nearly company sized—are nominally supposed to assist Cuba in harvesting sugar cane but are in fact intensive schools of Communist propaganda. Each brigade has a 20-25 person hard-core propaganda and political cadre. Each unit puts in approximately 10 weeks under Castro's control.

Not just anybody can join the "VBs", as U.S. security specialists dub the brigades. Today, there are over a dozen regional Venceremos committees covering the United States. These regional cells screen each applicant, who is required to fill out an exhaustive personal history which then forms the basis for his Cuban and often his KGB dossier.

In addition, he is photographed. Then, if recommended for acceptance, the would-be VB is given a final going-over by the Venceremos National Committee in New York, all of whose members have been chosen and appointed by the DGI.

After acceptance, VB recruits go either to Canada or Mexico, whence, in violation of State Department regulations, they proceed as a contingent to Cuba.

Once arrived, while most cut cane and imbibe propaganda, a chosen handful from each brigade is sent to terrorist or even espionage schooling in remote camps, several of which are known to exist in Oriente Province.

Despite widespread reports that Russia has been soft-peddling Castro in an attempt to facilitate U.S. recognition of Cuba, the intensification of DGI operations in and against this country has been largely financed and guided from the Kremlin by the KGB.

Even without Kremlin support, however, Castro has always kept the DGI on the prowl for ways to annoy, hurt and disorganize the United States.

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Were we to open an embassy in Washington and consulates throughout the country, and lift existing 28-mile travel restrictions the State Department imposes on the New York-based Cuban U.N. Mission, the country would be flooded with Cuban agents, both intelligence and subversive.

Since roughly 50 per cent of all Cuban diplomatic personnel abroad are DGI operatives, the bulk of these unwelcome newcomers would enjoy diplomatic immunity, another handicap for our own security and intelligence services and the reason that they, who know Fidel Castro best, look with such misgiving on the idea that Washington and Havana can just kiss and be friends again.

Showing communism's typical concentration on juvenile brainwashing, young American radicals with small children are specially welcomed. These youngsters, usually aged 8-13, are called *Venceremitos* ("Little Conquerers") and are put through special anti-American schooling while their parents work with the brigade.

But the top-priority Cuban terrorist penetration now in progress is the DGI's all-out support for all main and numerous splinter underground Puerto Rican revolutionary groups.

The Puerto Rican separatist "PSP" movement is the main link with Cuba and has offices enjoying diplomatic status in Havana. The DGI has financed, equipped and planned PSP bombings both in San Juan and in New York City.

Because the PSP has cells in such American cities as New York, Chicago, New Haven and Bridgeport, it provides a useful auxiliary for the DGI in both intelligence and terrorist missions in this country as well as in Puerto Rico.

According to FBI sources, some 150 Puerto Rican revolutionary leaders are training in Cuba, while the DGI has spent thousands of dollars distributing sophisticated Cuban manuals on urban terrorism to PSP cells.

Evidence in the hands of security specialists indicates the PSP may well now be mounting a long-planned wave of violence and that the recent simultaneous bombing of five public structures in New York City represent a PSP operation with DGI coaching and direction.

What the Cuban activities amount to is, in the words of one U.S. official, that, besides hemispheric misbehavior, "Fidel Castro is waging an undeclared war on the United States which shows no sign of letting up."